

# *Intergalactic eco-warrior in a red coat; Fonda has an opinion on everything from Trump to civil disobedience*

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## **Body**

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I wanted to be schooled by Jane Fonda.

There was a decent chance that we would get into a Megyn Kelly-type dust-up, where I waded into some topic she didn't want to discuss. But I was ready to take the risk.

I wanted Fonda, a glam Forrest Gump who has popped up on the front lines of culture, fitness, politics and Hollywood for more than half a century, to give me the lowdown on everything:

From Black Panthers to the Green New Deal, from a legendary sex life to no sex life, from plastic surgery to plastic prison handcuffs, from "Barbarella" to Quentin Tarantino, from Richard Nixon to Donald Trump, from Marilyn Monroe to TikTok, from bad vibes over "Hanoi Jane" to good vibrators.

And there she was on Zoom, looking fetching with her new grey pixie cut, speaking from her chic town house in Los Angeles.

"I went grey at just the right moment," she said. "I didn't know COVID was coming along. I got tired of the chemicals and the time and the money to keep myself this particular colour of blond, you know, enough already! And so I talked to the producers of 'Grace and Frankie'" - her Netflix series - "and I said, 'I want to go grey, but that would mean that Grace is going to have to go grey,' and they were all for it."

At 82, she still has the same intensity that made her a two-time Oscar winner, an anti-war activist and an intergalactic sexpot. And a repeater.

"Do you know what a repeater is," she said, her Pacific blue eyes trained on me. "Repeaters are the antennae that you see on top of mountains."

She continued: "They don't originate the signals, but the bottom-of-the-valley signals get picked up and then the repeaters take them from the valley and spread them to a much wider audience. That's what celebrities are."

Paging Ivanka

Fonda considered herself an environmentalist before this year, "but I hadn't really put my body on the line for it," she said. She had "fished the high seas with every important man in my life, starting with my father."

She knew about sea turtles strangling and polar bears starving. She used windmills and solar, bought an electric BMW, recycled, cut back on red meat and plastic. (But she still sneaks in the occasional order of spareribs.) She co-produced and starred in "The China Syndrome" in 1979, about the dangers of nuclear power.

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But then, last Labour Day weekend, driving up to Big Sur to hike with her pals Rosanna Arquette and Catherine Keener, she began keening about doing more.

"I was quivering all over," she writes in her new book, "What Can I Do?"

Inspired by Greta Thunberg and by Naomi Klein's book about the Green New Deal, she decided to dig out her sleeping bag, move to Washington for a year and camp out in front of the White House to protest climate change.

"Where will I poop and pee?" she wondered. "I'm way older now and have to get up during the night more often."

She didn't want to be dismissed as "an aging star bopping in from Hollywood." But then, as she said, she "got off my duff," bought a chic red coat from Neiman's and moved to Washington.

She felt she understood Trump because she recognized what she thought could be a similar dynamic in the upbringing of her third husband, Ted Turner.

"I thought, he's been traumatized as a child, kind of like Ted as a child, so there are certain things that I understand about this kind of man," she said. "So I thought, OK, I will find four of the most beautiful, sexy, smart, climate-interested women I can, and we'll go in and we'll kneel and we'll plead and beg."

She called Pamela Anderson, "and she was up for it," she said. Fonda was still thinking about who else - "maybe Sharon Stone."

"We'll tell him what needs to be done and what a serious crisis this is and we'll tell him that he will be the world's greatest hero, that kind of thing," she said. "I actually called Jared, or whatever his name is, and I told him my idea and he said, 'Well, Ivanka is the environmentalist in the family.' Yeah, sure. So she called me and I told her my idea and she laughed and I never heard from her again."

Fonda got backup from Annie Leonard, executive director of Greenpeace USA, who said that camping out was a bad idea - "There are going to be rats," Leonard told her - but that there were other ways to practise civil disobedience.

For four months, she played her role as a repeater, becoming the star of Fire Drill Fridays, a climate protest in front of the Capitol. She got arrested five times, and checked to see whether the black plastic handcuffs used by the police were recyclable.

The need for

civil disobedience

Back in Los Angeles, Fonda moved the action online, where she has been surprised by the reaction. "We keep growing," she said of the number of viewers of the Fire Drill Fridays video series with Greenpeace. "It was 100,000, it was 300,000, 400,000, now 600,000."

She has guests, including Mary Trump, who offered insights into the president's climate denialism. And she has the new book, offering lots of helpful tips to the ecologically challenged. "Eat less fish!"

Her time in the slammer caught the attention of Trump, who told a rally in Louisiana: "They arrested Jane Fonda; nothing changes."

"She's always got the handcuffs on, oh, man," he said. "She's waving to everybody with the handcuffs. I can't believe it." He added: "Every 25 years they arrest her."

She laughed when I brought it up.

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"I am of the belief that evil deeds, which Trump is committing, is the language of the traumatized," she said. "And you can hate the deeds. Don't hate the person because he wins if we hate him. Don't even give him that much energy."

"So, actually, I have empathy for him. I look at this person and I see a frightened child who is very, very dangerous because he's got his hands on all the buttons."

How does Trump compare to Nixon?

"Oh, it's far more dangerous," she said. "I can't even believe I'm saying this. In the '70s, I didn't even think about the positive things about Nixon. But there was the Clean Air Act, and he did great things for the tribal nations. I mean, he actually did some pretty good stuff and he was kind of smart and he knew foreign policy. So it wasn't so dangerous as somebody who has absolutely no limits to what he is prepared to do to take the country down."

While she declared herself "an Elizabeth Warren girl," she's happy with Kamala Harris and had a virtual fundraiser with Lily Tomlin for Joe Biden.

"My attitude is, look, I'd rather push a moderate than fight a fascist," she said. "You can push him," she added, referring to Biden. "He's already moved very far on climate."

She continued: "We have to cut fossil-fuel emissions in half by 2030 and that's going to be hard for him and we have to make them do it but we can. This is where civil disobedience comes in. And I will be one of the people in the streets as soon as 'Grace and Frankie' is over."

When she was living with her father and hanging out with the Black Panthers, Henry Fonda told her, "If I ever find out you're a communist, I'll be the first to turn you in." In the early '80s, she unofficially adopted Mary Williams, the daughter of two Black Panthers who could no longer take care of her.

She noted that there was "a feeling of love" about Black Lives Matter protests "that was missing with the Panthers back in the '70s. I think one reason is because women are in the leadership." She said that around the time of the unrest in Ferguson, Missouri, "one day I got in the mail some flyers about self-care from Black Lives Matter. And it was like, this is a movement that's talking to activists about self-care? That's new."

In her book, she is surprised when she meets a young woman from Hanoi who has never heard of her incarnation as "Hanoi Jane."

"Oh, I've been there a few times," she told the young woman dryly.

No matter how many times she has apologized for an ill-advised photo op on a North Vietnamese anti-aircraft gun, explaining that being anti-war did not mean she was against American soldiers, she knows that some on the right will never let her live it down.

"I think, just as there are some people who actually believe that Trump is doing a good job and has fulfilled all his promises, there are people who think that I was against the troops and that what I did was treasonous, and that probably will not change," she said. "I never did let it stop me. I apologize. I try to explain the context. And then I move on."

She's on TikTok

Even though Fonda has a fascinating past, and even though she has done a lot of excavating of her past, she emphatically does not live in the past.

The woman who revolutionized the market for home videos with her fitness tape and leg warmers in the '80s is lately playing around on TikTok, doing one video that is an homage to her iconic workout for people stuck at home in fattening quarantine.

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Unlike most, she is not down on millennials. "I think they are absolutely great and they are making a huge difference, and I feel absolutely hopeful," she said.

She drolly noted that "one of the good things about being an activist is that you come in contact with woke men."

Does Fonda, who used to hang around with Marlon Brando and Warren Beatty, think that Netflix has eclipsed the glamour of old Hollywood?

She told me to snap out of it.

"Oh, I don't share that feeling about that time," she said briskly. "I don't watch old movies, almost never. I was always outside. I didn't care about movies." She continued: "I don't romanticize that time at all, and I find that the actors today are just brilliant."

In particular, she said, she's really digging Saoirse Ronan; Michaela Coel and her show on HBO, "I May Destroy You"; Issa Rae and her HBO show, "Insecure"; and Ramy Youssef's show on Hulu called "Ramy." She said she loved the Charlize Theron's Netflix superhero movie, "The Old Guard."

She grew up around John Ford, a friend of her father's, and started her career with Joshua Logan, but the two directors she fantasizes about working with now are Quentin Tarantino and Wes Anderson.

"What I want is for Wes Anderson to come along and cast me in something that I never, ever would have thought of for myself," she said.

And what would she envision doing for Tarantino?

"Whatever he wanted," she said.

The coat to end all coats

In her Netflix series, Fonda's character, Grace, is an uptight WASP who falls into an odd-couple relationship with the free-spirited Frankie, played by her real-life friend Lily Tomlin, after their husbands declare they are in love with each other.

Tomlin said that Fonda's mantra, from the time she was a child, had been: "I can make it better."

"She's so clearly outspoken and it's always well intentioned," Tomlin said, "but she'll still say out loud on the set, 'You need a haircut,' and then she'll go around until she finds someone to cut the person's hair. And then the person will come back and say, 'Actually, it does look better.'"

Fonda, whose mother died by suicide while in a psychiatric centre, said, "I didn't have much parenting, so it's really been my women friends that have taught me how to be."

Like Fonda, Grace allows herself to be moulded by the men in her life, until she suddenly declares to one boyfriend that she doesn't really like golf or hoagies and she's not going to pretend anymore. Frankie teases Grace about her sparse eating habits, saying she could fit in a glove compartment, and about her plastic surgery.

I asked Fonda why she said she was renouncing plastic surgery. "I'm almost 83 years old," she said. "I mean, enough already."

She said she ate healthy and worked out with a trainer, wearing masks and gloves. "And I have fillers," she said. "And I'm an activist, so I feel good, and I think that's the most important part of it. If I felt grumpy and depressed, I wouldn't look so good."

"And the other thing is, I have good posture. And, believe it or not, that is critical. I've worked hard to have a very strong back."

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In keeping with her focus on the environment, she has sworn off shopping and said that her renowned red coat from Fire Drill Fridays would be the last thing she ever bought.

Although she dates up a storm in "Grace and Frankie," and gets involved in selling yam lube cooked up by Tomlin's character, as well as vibrators for older women, with large-print instructions and a grip that won't aggravate arthritis, Fonda said two years ago that she had "closed up shop down there."

After a lifetime of being a chameleon, changing to please her father and three very different husbands, Fonda breezily says now, "I have no interest."

"I don't have time," she said. "I am fully complete with me and my children and my grandchildren and my friends. I don't want any more romance. I don't have time for it."

She recalled that when she was with Turner, in order to find time to write, she would have to abscond with her laptop in the middle of their fishing trips.

"You know, just about every day," she said, "I'll be in the middle of something and think, I would never have had time to do this or read this if I was trying to keep a relationship good."

But she must get hit on. I told her that my researcher, Shawn McCreesh, had just watched "Barbarella" for the first time. Also, he saw her in the elevator at the New York Times when she visited our office during Fire Drill Fridays and thought she was a stone-cold fox.

"Is that good or bad?" she wondered.

She said no one propositioned her anymore. "Zero," she said. "No, and I'm not lonely. I've never been lonely. I've never been bored or lonely in my life."

So if she had a free Saturday night, what would she do?

"Read," she said. "And between the fact that I'm alone plus the COVID, I'm discovering so much TV."

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